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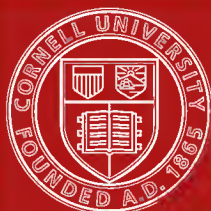
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THE COMEDY OF HUMAN LIFE

BY H. DE BALZAC

SCENES FROM PROVINCIAL LIFE

THE LILY OF THE VALLEY



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THE WORKS
OF
HONORÉ DE BALZAC

TRANSLATED BY
KATHARINE PRESCOTT WORMELEY

VOLUME VII

THE LILY OF THE VALLEY
LOST ILLUSIONS

Illustrated

By LAURENT-DESROUSSEAUX AND P. OUTIN

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
BOSTON

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TO

MONSIEUR J. B. NACQUART,

Member of the Royal Academy of Medicine.

DEAR DOCTOR,—Here is one of the most carefully hewn stones in the second course of the foundation of a literary edifice which I have slowly and laboriously constructed. I wish to inscribe your name upon it, as much to thank the man whose science once saved me as to honor the friend of my daily life.

DE BALZAC.

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*Designed by Laurent Desrousseaux, and reproduced in photogravure
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THE LILY OF THE VALLEY.

ENVOI.

FÉLIX DE VANDENESSE TO MADAME LA COMTESSE NATALIE DE
MANERVILLE :

I YIELD to your wishes. It is the privilege of the women whom we love more than they love us to make the men who love them ignore the ordinary rules of common-sense. To smooth the frown upon their brow, to soften the pout upon their lips, what obstacles we miraculously overcome ! We shed our blood, we risk our future !

You exact the history of my past life ; here it is. But remember this, Natalie ; in obeying you I crush under foot a reluctance hitherto unconquerable. Why are you jealous of the sudden reveries which overtake me in the midst of our happiness ? Why show the pretty anger of a petted woman when silence grasps me ? Could you not play upon the contradictions of my character without inquiring into the causes of them ? Are there secrets in your heart which seek absolution through a knowledge of mine ? Ah ! Natalie, you have guessed mine ; and it is better you should know the whole truth. Yes, my life is shadowed by a phantom ; a word evokes it ; it hovers vaguely above me and about me ; within my soul are

solemn memories, buried in its depths like those marine productions seen in calmest weather and which the storms of ocean cast in fragments on the shore.

The mental labor which the expression of ideas necessitates has revived the old, old feelings which give me so much pain when they come suddenly ; and if in this confession of my past they break forth in a way that wounds you, remember that you threatened to punish me if I did not obey your wishes, and do not, therefore, punish my obedience. I would that this, my confidence, might increase your love.

Until we meet,

FÉLIX.

I.

TWO CHILDHOODS.

To what genius fed on tears shall we some day owe that most touching of all elegies, — the tale of tortures borne silently by souls whose tender roots find stony ground in the domestic soil, whose earliest buds are torn apart by rancorous hands, whose flowers are touched by frost at the moment of their blossoming? What poet will sing the sorrows of the child whose lips must suck a bitter breast, whose smiles are checked by the cruel fire of a stern eye? The tale that tells of such poor hearts, oppressed by beings placed about them to promote the development of their natures, would contain the true history of my childhood.

What vanity could I have wounded, — I a child new-born? What moral or physical infirmity caused my mother's coldness? Was I the child of duty, whose

birth is a mere chance, or was I one whose very life was a reproach? Put to nurse in the country and forgotten by my family for over three years, I was treated with such indifference on my return to the parental roof that even the servants pitied me. I do not know to what feeling or happy accident I owed my rescue from this first neglect; as a child I was ignorant of it, as a man I have not discovered it. Far from easing my lot, my brother and my two sisters found amusement in making me suffer. The compact in virtue of which children hide each other's peccadilloes, and which early teaches them the principles of honor, was null and void in my case; more than that, I was often punished for my brother's faults, without being allowed to prove the injustice. The fawning spirit which seems instinctive in children taught my brother and sisters to join in the persecutions to which I was subjected, and thus keep in the good graces of a mother whom they feared as much as I. Was this partly the effect of a childish love of imitation; was it from a need of testing their powers; or was it simply through lack of pity? Perhaps these causes united to deprive me of the sweets of fraternal intercourse.

Disinherited of all affection, I could love nothing; yet nature had made me loving. Is there an angel who garners the sighs of feeling hearts rebuffed incessantly? If in many such hearts the crushed feelings turn to hatred, in mine they condensed and hollowed a depth from which, in after years, they gushed forth upon my life. In many characters the habit of trembling relaxes the fibres and begets fear, and fear ends in submission; hence, a weakness which emasculates a man, and

makes him more or less a slave. But in my case these perpetual tortures led to the development of a certain strength, which increased through exercise and predisposed my spirit to the habit of moral resistance. Always in expectation of some new grief — as the martyrs expected some fresh blow — my whole being expressed, I doubt not, a sullen resignation which smothered the grace and gayety of childhood, and gave me an appearance of idiocy which seemed to justify my mother's threatening prophecies. The certainty of injustice prematurely roused my pride — that fruit of reason — and thus, no doubt, checked the evil tendencies which an education like mine encouraged.

Though my mother neglected me I was sometimes the object of her solicitude; she occasionally spoke of my education and seemed desirous of attending to it herself. Cold chills ran through me at such times when I thought of the torture a daily intercourse with her would inflict upon me. I blessed the neglect in which I lived, and rejoiced that I could stay alone in the garden and play with the pebbles and watch the insects and gaze into the blueness of the sky. Though my loneliness naturally led me to revery, my liking for contemplation was first aroused by an incident which will give you an idea of my early troubles. So little notice was taken of me that the governess occasionally forgot to send me to bed. One evening I was peacefully crouching under a fig-tree, watching a star with that passion of curiosity which takes possession of a child's mind, and to which my precocious melancholy gave a sort of sentimental intuition. My sisters were playing about and laughing; I heard their distant chatter like

an accompaniment to my thoughts. After a while the noise ceased and darkness fell. My mother happened to notice my absence. To escape blame, our governess, a terrible Mademoiselle Caroline, worked upon my mother's fears,—told her I had a horror of my home and would long ago have run away if she had not watched me; that I was not stupid but sullen; and that in all her experience of children she had never known one of so bad a disposition as mine. She pretended to search for me. I answered as soon as I was called, and she came to the fig-tree, where she very well knew I was. "What are you doing there?" she asked. "Watching a star." "You were not watching a star," said my mother, who was listening on her balcony; "children of your age know nothing of astronomy." "Ah, madame," cried Mademoiselle Caroline, "he has opened the faucet of the reservoir; the garden is inundated!" Then there was a general excitement. The fact was that my sisters had amused themselves by turning the cock to see the water flow, but a sudden spurt wet them all over and frightened them so much that they ran away without closing it. Accused and convicted of this piece of mischief and told that I lied when I denied it, I was severely punished. Worse than all, I was jeered at for my pretended love of the stars and forbidden to stay in the garden after dark.

Such tyrannical restraints intensify a passion in the hearts of children even more than in those of men; children think of nothing but the forbidden thing, which then becomes irresistibly attractive to them. I was often whipped for my star. Unable to confide in my kind, I told it all my troubles in that delicious inward

prattle with which we stammer our first ideas, just as once we stammered our first words. At twelve years of age, long after I was at school, I still watched that star with indescribable delight, — so deep and lasting are the impressions we receive in the dawn of life.

My brother Charles, five years older than I and as handsome a boy as he now is a man, was the favorite of my father, the idol of my mother, and consequently the sovereign of the house. He was robust and well-made, and had a tutor. I, puny and even sickly, was sent at five years of age as day pupil to a school in the town; taken in the morning and brought back at night by my father's valet. I was sent with a scanty lunch, while my school-fellows brought plenty of good food. This trifling contrast between my privations and their prosperity made me suffer deeply. The famous potted pork prepared at Tours and called "rillettes" and "rillons" was the chief feature of their mid-day meal, between the early breakfast and the parent's dinner, which was ready when we returned from school. This preparation of meat, much prized by certain gourmands, is seldom seen at Tours on aristocratic tables; if I had ever heard of it before I went to school, I certainly had never had the happiness of seeing that brown mess spread on slices of bread and butter. Nevertheless, my desire for those "rillons" was so great that it grew to be a fixed idea, like the longing of an elegant Parisian duchess for the stews cooked by a porter's wife, — longings which, being a woman, she found means to satisfy. Children guess each other's covetousness, just as you are able to read a man's love, by the look in the eyes; consequently I became an admirable butt for ridicule.

My comrades, nearly all belonging to the lower bourgeoisie, would show me their "rillons" and ask if I knew how they were made and where they were sold, and why it was that I never had any. They licked their lips as they talked of them — scraps of pork pressed in their own fat and looking like cooked truffles; they inspected my lunch-basket, and finding nothing better than Olivet cheese or dried fruits, they plagued me with questions: "Is that all you have? have you really nothing else?" — speeches which made me realize the difference between my brother and myself.

This contrast between my own abandonment and the happiness of others nipped the roses of my childhood and blighted my budding youth. The first time that I, mistaking my comrades' action for generosity, put forth my hand to take the dainty I had so long coveted and which was now hypocritically held out to me, my tormentor pulled back his slice to the great delight of his comrades who were expecting that result. If noble and distinguished minds are, as we often find them, capable of vanity, can we blame the child who weeps when despised and jeered at? Under such a trial many boys would have turned into gluttons and cringing beggars. I fought to escape my persecutors. The courage of despair made me formidable; but I was hated, and thus had no protection against treachery. One evening as I left school I was struck in the back by a handful of small stones tied in a handkerchief. When the valet, who punished the perpetrator, told this to my mother she exclaimed: "That dreadful child! he will always be a torment to us."

Finding that I inspired in my schoolmates the same

repulsion that was felt for me by my family, I sank into a horrible distrust of myself. A second fall of snow checked the seeds that were germinating in my soul. The boys whom I saw most liked were notorious scamps; this fact roused my pride and I held aloof. Again I was shut up within myself and had no vent for the feelings with which my heart was full. The master of the school, observing that I was gloomy, disliked by my comrades and always alone, confirmed the family verdict as to my sulky temper. As soon as I could read and write, my mother transferred me to Pont-le-Voy, a school in charge of Oratorians who took boys of my age into a form called the "class of the Latin steps" where dull lads with torpid brains were apt to linger.

There I remained eight years without seeing my family; living the life of a pariah, — partly for the following reason. I received but three francs a month pocket-money, a sum barely sufficient to buy the pens, ink, paper, knives, and rulers which we were forced to supply ourselves. Unable to buy stilts or skipping-ropes, or any of the things that were used in the playground, I was driven out of the games; to gain admission on suffrage I should have had to toady the rich and flatter the strong of my division. My heart rose against either of these meannesses, which, however, most children readily employ. I lived under a tree, lost in dejected thought, or reading the books distributed to us monthly by the librarian. How many griefs were in the shadow of that solitude; what genuine anguish filled my neglected life! Imagine what my sore heart felt when, at the first distribution of prizes, — of which I obtained the two most valued, namely, for theme and for trans-

lation, — neither my father nor my mother was present in the theatre when I came forward to receive the awards amid general acclamations, although the building was filled with the relatives of all my comrades. Instead of kissing the distributor, according to custom, I burst into tears and threw myself on his breast. That night I burned my crowns in the stove. The parents of the other boys were in town for a whole week preceding the distribution of the prizes, and my comrades departed joyfully the next day ; while I, whose father and mother were only a few miles distant, remained at the school with the *outrémers*, — a name given to scholars whose families were in the colonies or in foreign countries.

You will notice throughout how my unhappiness increased in proportion as the social spheres on which I entered widened. God knows what efforts I made to weaken the decree which condemned me to live within myself ! What hopes, long cherished with eagerness of soul, were doomed to perish in a day ! To persuade my parents to come and see me, I wrote them letters full of feeling, too emphatically worded, it may be ; but surely such letters ought not to have drawn upon me my mother's reprimand, coupled with ironical reproaches for my style. Not discouraged even then, I implored the help of my sisters, to whom I always wrote on their birthdays and fête-days with the persistence of a neglected child ; but it was all in vain. As the day for the distribution of prizes approached I redoubled my entreaties, and told of my expected triumphs. Misled by my parents' silence, I expected them with a beating heart. I told my schoolfellows

they were coming ; and then, when the old porter's step sounded in the corridors as he called my happy comrades one by one to receive their friends, I was sick with expectation. Never did that old man call my name !

One day, when I accused myself to my confessor of having cursed my life, he pointed to the skies, where grew, he said, the promised palm for the *Beati qui lugent* of the Saviour. From the period of my first communion I flung myself into the mysterious depths of prayer, attracted to religious ideas whose moral fairyland so fascinates young spirits. Burning with ardent faith, I prayed to God to renew in my behalf the miracles I had read of in martyrology. At five years of age I fled to my star ; at twelve I took refuge in the sanctuary. My ecstasy brought dreams unspeakable, which fed my imagination, fostered my susceptibilities, and strengthened my thinking powers. I have often attributed those sublime visions to the guardian angel charged with moulding my spirit to its divine destiny ; they endowed my soul with the faculty of seeing the inner soul of things ; they prepared my heart for the magic craft which makes a man a poet when the fatal power is his to compare what he feels within him with reality, — the great things aimed for with the small things gained. Those visions wrote upon my brain a book in which I read that which I must voice ; they laid upon my lips the coal of utterance.

My father having conceived some doubts as to the tendency of the Oratorian teachings, took me from Pont-le-Voy and sent me to Paris to an institution in the Marais. I was then fifteen. When examined as

to my capacity, I, who was in the rhetoric class at Pont-le-Voy, was pronounced worthy of the third class. The sufferings I had endured in my family and in school were continued under another form during my stay at the Lepître Academy. My father gave me no money; I was to be fed, clothed, and stuffed with Latin and Greek, for a sum agreed on. During my school life I came in contact with over a thousand comrades; but I never met with such an instance of neglect and indifference as mine. Monsieur Lepître, who was fanatically attached to the Bourbons, had had relations with my father at the time when all devoted royalists were endeavoring to bring about the escape of Marie Antoinette from the Temple. They had lately renewed acquaintance; and Monsieur Lepître thought himself obliged to repair my father's oversight, and to give me a small sum monthly. But not being authorized to do so, the amount was small indeed.

The Lepître establishment was in the old Joyeuse mansion where, as in all seignorial houses, there was a porter's lodge. During a recess, which preceded the hour when the man-of-all-work took us to the Charlemagne Lyceum, the well-to-do pupils used to breakfast with the porter, named Doisy. Monsieur Lepître was either ignorant of the fact or he connived at this arrangement with Doisy, a regular smuggler whom it was the pupils' interest to protect, — he being the secret guardian of their pranks, the safe confidant of their late returns and their intermediary for obtaining forbidden books. Breakfast on a cup of *café-au-lait* is an aristocratic habit, explained by the high prices to which colonial products rose under Napoleon. If the use of sugar

and coffee was a luxury to our parents, with us it was the sign of self-conscious superiority. Doisy gave credit, for he reckoned on the sisters and aunts of the pupils, who made it a point of honor to pay their debts. I resisted the blandishments of his place for a long time. If my judges knew the strength of its seduction, the heroic efforts I made after stoicism, the repressed desires of my long resistance, they would pardon my final overthrow. But, child as I was, could I have the grandeur of soul that scorns the scorn of others? Moreover, I may have felt the promptings of several social vices whose power was increased by my longings.

About the end of the second year my father and mother came to Paris. My brother had written me the day of their arrival. He lived in Paris, but had never been to see me. My sisters, he said, were of the party; we were all to see Paris together. The first day we were to dine in the Palais-Royal, so as to be near the Théâtre-Français. In spite of the intoxication such a programme of un hoped-for delights excited, my joy was damped by the wind of a coming storm, which those who are used to unhappiness apprehend instinctively. I was forced to own a debt of a hundred francs to the Sieur Doisy, who threatened to ask my parents himself for the money. I bethought me of making my brother the emissary of Doisy, the mouth-piece of my repentance and the mediator of pardon. My father inclined to forgiveness, but my mother was pitiless; her dark blue eye froze me; she fulminated cruel prophecies: "What should I be later if at seventeen years of age I committed such follies? Was I really a son of hers? Did I mean to ruin my family? Did I

think myself the only child of the house? My brother Charles's career, already begun, required large outlay, amply deserved by his conduct which did honor to the family, while mine would always disgrace it. Did I know nothing of the value of money, and what I cost them? Of what use were coffee and sugar to my education? Such conduct was the first step into all the vices."

After enduring the shock of this torrent which rasped my soul, I was sent back to school in charge of my brother. I lost the dinner at the Frères Provençaux, and was deprived of seeing Talma in Britannicus. Such was my first interview with my mother after a separation of twelve years.

When I had finished school my father left me under the guardianship of Monsieur Lepitre. I was to study the higher mathematics, follow a course of law for one year, and begin philosophy. Allowed to study in my own room and released from the classes, I expected a truce with trouble. But, in spite of my nineteen years, perhaps because of them, my father persisted in the system which had sent me to school without food, to an academy without pocket-money, and had driven me into debt to Doisy. Very little money was allowed to me, and what can you do in Paris without money? Moreover, my freedom was carefully chained up. Monsieur Lepitre sent me to the law school accompanied by a man-of-all-work who handed me over to the professor and fetched me home again. A young girl would have been treated with less precaution than my mother's fears insisted on for me. Paris alarmed my parents, and justly. Students are secretly engaged in the same

occupation which fills the minds of young ladies in their boarding-schools. Do what you will, nothing can prevent the latter from talking of lovers, or the former of women. But in Paris, and especially at this particular time, such talk among young lads was influenced by the oriental and sultanic atmosphere and customs of the Palais-Royal.

The Palais-Royal was an Eldorado of love where the ingots melted away in coin; there virgin doubts were over; there curiosity was appeased. The Palais-Royal and I were two asymptotes bearing one towards the other, yet unable to meet. Fate miscarried all my attempts. My father had presented me to one of my aunts who lived in the Île St. Louis. With her I was to dine on Sundays and Thursdays, escorted to the house by either Monsieur or Madame Lepitre, who went out themselves on those days and were to call for me on their way home. Singular amusement for a young lad! My aunt, the Marquise de Listomère, was a great lady, of ceremonious habits, who would never have dreamed of offering me money. Old as a cathedral, painted like a miniature, sumptuous in dress, she lived in her great house as though Louis XV. were not dead, and saw none but old women and men of a past day, — a fossil society which made me think I was in a graveyard. No one spoke to me and I had not the courage to speak first. Cold and alien looks made me ashamed of my youth, which seemed to annoy them. I counted on this indifference to aid me in certain plans; I was resolved to escape some day directly after dinner and rush to the Palais-Royal. Once seated at whist my aunt would pay no attention to me. Jean,

the footman, cared little for Monsieur Lepitre and would have aided me ; but on the day I chose for my adventure that luckless dinner was longer than usual, — either because the jaws employed were more worn out or the false teeth more imperfect. At last, between eight and nine o'clock, I reached the staircase, my heart beating like that of Bianca Capello on the day of her flight ; but when the porter pulled the cord I beheld in the street before me Monsieur Lepitre's hackney-coach, and I heard his pury voice demanding me !

Three times did fate interpose between the hell of the Palais-Royal and the heaven of my youth. On the day when I, ashamed at twenty years of age of my own ignorance, determined to risk all dangers to put an end to it, at the very moment when I was about to run away from Monsieur Lepitre as he got into the coach, — a difficult process, for he was as fat as Louis XVIII. and club-footed, — well, can you believe it, my mother arrived in a post-chaise ! Her glance arrested me ; I stood still, like a bird before a snake. What fate had brought her there ? The simplest thing in the world. Napoleon was then making his last efforts. My father, who foresaw the return of the Bourbons, had come to Paris with my mother to advise my brother, who was employed in the imperial diplomatic service. My mother was to take me back with her, out of the way of dangers which seemed, to those who followed the march of events intelligently, to threaten the capital. In a few minutes, as it were, I was taken out of Paris, at the very moment when my life there was about to become fatal to me.

The tortures of imagination excited by repressed de

sires, the weariness of a life depressed by constant privations had driven me to study, just as men, weary of fate, confine themselves in a cloister. To me, study had become a passion, which might even be fatal to my health by imprisoning me at a period of life when young men ought to yield to the bewitching activities of their springtide youth.

This slight sketch of my boyhood, in which you, Natalie, can readily perceive innumerable songs of woe, was needful to explain to you its influence on my future life. At twenty years of age, and affected by many morbid elements, I was still small and thin and pale. My soul, filled with the will to do, struggled with a body that seemed weakly, but which, in the words of an old physician at Tours, was undergoing its final fusion into a temperament of iron. Child in body and old in mind, I had read and thought so much that I knew life metaphysically in its highest reaches at the moment when I was about to enter the tortuous difficulties of its defiles and the sandy roads of its plains. A strange chance had held me long in that delightful period when the soul awakes to its first tumults, to its desires for joy, and the savor of life is fresh. I stood in the period between puberty and manhood,—the one prolonged by my excessive study, the other tardily developing its living shoots. No young man was ever more thoroughly prepared to feel and to love. To understand my history, let your mind dwell on that pure time of youth when the mouth is innocent of falsehood; when the glance of the eye is honest, though veiled by lids which droop from timidity contradicting desire; when the soul bends not to worldly Jesuitism, and the heart throbs as

violently from trepidation as from the generous impulses of young emotion.

I need say nothing of the journey I made with my mother from Paris to Tours. The coldness of her behavior repressed me. At each relay I tried to speak; but a look, a word from her frightened away the speeches I had been meditating. At Orléans, where we had passed the night, my mother complained of my silence. I threw myself at her feet and clasped her knees; with tears I opened my heart. I tried to touch hers by the eloquence of my hungry love in accents that might have moved a stepmother. She replied that I was playing comedy. I complained that she had abandoned me. She called me an unnatural child. My whole nature was so wrung that at Blois I went upon the bridge to drown myself in the Loire. The height of the parapet prevented my suicide.

When I reached home, my two sisters, who did not know me, showed more surprise than tenderness. Afterwards, however, they seemed, by comparison, to be full of kindness towards me. I was given a room on the third story. You will understand the extent of my hardships when I tell you that my mother left me, a young man of twenty, without other linen than my miserable school outfit, or any other outside clothes than those I had long worn in Paris. If I ran from one end of the room to the other to pick up her handkerchief, she took it with the cold thanks a lady gives to her footman. Driven to watch her to find if there were any soft spot where I could fasten the rootlets of affection, I came to see her as she was, — a tall, spare woman, given to cards, egotistical and insolent, like all the

Listomères, who count insolence as part of their dowry. She saw nothing in life except duties to be fulfilled. All cold women whom I have known made, as she did, a religion of duty ; she received our homage as a priest receives the incense of the mass. My elder brother appeared to absorb the trifling sentiment of maternity which was in her nature. She stabbed us constantly with her sharp irony, — the weapon of those who have no heart, — and which she used against us, who could make her no reply.

Notwithstanding these thorny hindrances, the instinctive sentiments have so many roots, the religious fear inspired by a mother whom it is dangerous to displease holds by so many threads, that the sublime mistake — if I may so call it — of our love for our mother lasted until the day, much later in our lives, when we judged her finally. This terrible despotism drove from my mind all thoughts of the voluptuous enjoyments I had dreamed of finding at Tours. In despair I took refuge in my father's library, where I set myself to read every book I did not know. These long periods of hard study saved me from contact with my mother ; but they aggravated the dangers of my moral condition. Sometimes my eldest sister — she who afterwards married our cousin, the Marquis de Listomère — tried to comfort me, without, however, being able to calm the irritation to which I was a victim. I desired to die.

Great events, of which I knew nothing, were then in preparation. The Duc d'Angoulême, who had left Bordeaux to join Louis XVIII. in Paris, was received in every town through which he passed with ovations inspired by the enthusiasm felt throughout old France at

the return of the Bourbons. Touraine was aroused for its legitimate princes ; the town itself was in a flutter, every window decorated, the inhabitants in their Sunday clothes, a festival in preparation, and that nameless excitement in the air which intoxicates, and which gave me a strong desire to be present at the ball given to the duke. When I summoned courage to make this request of my mother, who was too ill to go herself, she became extremely angry. " Had I come from Congo ? " she inquired. " How could I suppose that our family would not be represented at the ball ? In the absence of my father and brother, of course it was my duty to be present. Had I no mother ? Was she not always thinking of the welfare of her children ? "

In a moment the semi-disinherited son had become a personage ! I was more dumfounded by my importance than by the deluge of ironical reasoning with which my mother received my request. I questioned my sisters, and then discovered that my mother, who liked such theatrical plots, was already attending to my clothes. The tailors in Tours were fully occupied by the sudden demands of their regular customers, and my mother was forced to employ her usual seamstress, who — according to provincial custom — could do all kinds of sewing. A bottle-blue coat had been secretly made for me, after a fashion, and silk stockings and pumps provided ; waistcoats were then worn short, so that I could wear one of my father's ; and for the first time in my life I had a shirt with a frill, the pleatings of which puffed out my chest and were gathered in to the knot of my cravat. When dressed in this apparel I looked so little like myself that my sister's compliments nerved

me to face all Touraine at the ball. But it was a bold enterprise. Thanks to my slimness I slipped into a tent set up in the gardens of the Papion house, and found a place close to the armchair in which the duke was seated. Instantly I was suffocated by the heat, and dazzled by the lights, the scarlet draperies, the gilded ornaments, the dresses, and the diamonds of the first public ball I had ever witnessed. I was pushed hither and thither by a mass of men and women, who hustled each other in a cloud of dust. The brazen clash of military music was drowned in the hurrahs and acclamations of "Long live the Duc d'Angoulême! Long live the King! Long live the Bourbons!" The ball was an outburst of pent-up enthusiasm, where each man endeavored to outdo the rest in his fierce haste to worship the rising sun, — an exhibition of partisan greed which left me unmoved, or rather, it disgusted me and drove me back within myself.

Swept onward like a straw in the whirlwind, I was seized with a childish desire to be the Duc d'Angoulême himself, to be one of these princes parading before an awed assemblage. This silly fancy of a Tourangean lad roused an ambition to which my nature and the surrounding circumstances lent dignity. Who would not envy such worship? — a magnificent repetition of which I saw a few months later, when all Paris rushed to the feet of the Emperor on his return from Elba. The sense of this dominion exercised over the masses, whose feelings and whose very life are thus merged into one soul, dedicated me then and thenceforth to glory, that priestess who slaughters the Frenchmen of to-day as the Druidess once sacrificed the Gauls.

Suddenly I met the woman who was destined to spur these ambitious desires and to crown them by sending me into the heart of royalty. Too timid to ask any one to dance, — fearing, moreover, to confuse the figures, — I naturally became very awkward, and did not know what to do with my arms and legs. Just as I was suffering severely from the pressure of the crowd an officer stepped on my feet, swollen by the new leather of my shoes as well as by the heat. This disgusted me with the whole affair. It was impossible to get away ; but I took refuge in a corner of a room at the end of an empty bench, where I sat with fixed eyes, motionless and sullen. Misled by my puny appearance, a woman — taking me for a sleepy child — slid softly into the place beside me, with the motion of a bird as she drops upon her nest. Instantly I breathed the woman-atmosphere, which irradiated my soul as, in after days, oriental poesy has shone there. I looked at my neighbor, and was more dazzled by that vision than I had been by the scene of the *fête*.

If you have understood this history of my early life you will guess the feelings which now welled up within me. My eyes rested suddenly on white, rounded shoulders where I would fain have laid my head, — shoulders faintly rosy, which seemed to blush as if uncovered for the first time ; modest shoulders, that possessed a soul, and reflected light from their satin surface as from a silken texture. These shoulders were parted by a line along which my eyes wandered. I raised myself to see the bust and was spell-bound by the beauty of the bosom, chastely covered with gauze, where blue-veined globes of perfect outline were softly hidden in waves of lace.

The slightest details of the head were each and all enchantments which awakened infinite delights within me; the brilliancy of the hair laid smoothly above a neck as soft and velvety as a child's, the white lines drawn by the comb where my imagination ran as along a dewy path, — all these things put me, as it were, beside myself. Glancing round to be sure that no one saw me, I threw myself upon those shoulders as a child upon the breast of its mother, kissing them as I laid my head there. The woman uttered a piercing cry, which the noise of the music drowned; she turned, saw me, and exclaimed, "Monsieur!" Ah! had she said, "My little lad, what possesses you?" I might have killed her; but at the word "Monsieur!" hot tears fell from my eyes. I was petrified by a glance of saintly anger, by a noble face crowned with a diadem of golden hair in harmony with the shoulders I adored. The crimson of offended modesty glowed on her cheeks, though already it was appeased by the pardoning instinct of a woman who comprehends a frenzy which she inspires, and divines the infinite adoration of those repentant tears. She moved away with the step and carriage of a queen.

I then felt the ridicule of my position; for the first time I realized that I was dressed like the monkey of a barrel organ. I was ashamed. There I stood, stupefied, — tasting the fruit that I had stolen, conscious of the warmth upon my lips, repenting not, and following with my eyes the woman who had come down to me from heaven. Sick with the first fever of the heart I wandered through the rooms, unable to find mine Unknown, until at last I went home to bed, another man.

A new soul, a soul with rainbow wings, had burst its chrysalis. Descending from the azure wastes where I had long admired her, my star had come to me a woman, with undiminished lustre and purity. I loved, knowing nought of love. How strange a thing, this first irruption of the keenest human emotion in the heart of a man! I had seen pretty women in other places, but none had made the slightest impression upon me. Can there be an appointed hour, a conjunction of stars, a union of circumstances, a certain woman among all others to awaken an exclusive passion at the period of life when love includes the whole sex?

The thought that my Elect lived in Touraine made the air I breathed delicious; the blue of the sky seemed bluer than I had ever yet seen it. I raved internally, but externally I was seriously ill, and my mother had fears, not unmingled with remorse. Like animals who know when danger is near, I hid myself away in the garden to think of the kiss that I had stolen. A few days after this memorable ball my mother attributed my neglect of study, my indifference to her tyrannical looks and sarcasms, and my gloomy behavior to the condition of my health. The country, that perpetual remedy for ills that doctors cannot cure, seemed to her the best means of bringing me out of my apathy. She decided that I should spend a few weeks at Frapesle, a château on the Indre midway between Montbazou and Azay-le-Rideau, which belonged to a friend of hers, to whom, no doubt, she gave private instructions.

By the day when I thus for the first time gained my liberty I had swum so vigorously in Love's ocean that I had well-nigh crossed it. I knew nothing of mine un-

known lady, neither her name, nor where to find her ; to whom, indeed, could I speak of her? My sensitive nature so exaggerated the inexplicable fears which beset all youthful hearts at the first approach of love that I began with the melancholy which often ends a hopeless passion. I asked nothing better than to roam about the country, to come and go and live in the fields. With the courage of a child that fears no failure, in which there is something really chivalrous, I determined to search every château in Touraine, travelling on foot, and saying to myself as each old tower came in sight, "She is there!"

Accordingly, of a Thursday morning I left Tours by the barrier of Saint-Eloy, crossed the bridges of Saint-Sauveur, reached Poncher whose every house I examined, and took the road to Chinon. For the first time in my life I could sit down under a tree or walk fast or slow as I pleased without being dictated to by any one. To a poor lad crushed under all sorts of despotism (which more or less does weigh upon all youth) the first employment of freedom, even though it be expended upon nothing, lifts the soul with irrepressible buoyancy. Several reasons combined to make that day one of enchantment. During my school years I had never been taken to walk more than two or three miles from a city ; yet there remained in my mind among the earliest recollections of my childhood that feeling for the beautiful which the scenery about Tours inspires. Though quite untaught as to the poetry of such a landscape, I was, unknown to myself, critical upon it, like those who imagine the ideal of art without knowing anything of its practice.

To reach the château of Frapesle, foot-passengers, or those on horseback, shorten the way by crossing the Charlemagne moors, — uncultivated tracts of land lying on the summit of the plateau which separates the valley of the Cher from that of the Indre, and over which there is a cross-road leading to Champy. These moors are flat and sandy, and for more than three miles are dreary enough until you reach, through a clump of woods, the road to Saché, the name of the township in which Frapesle stands. This road, which joins that of Chinon beyond Ballan, skirts an undulating plain to the little hamlet of Artanne. Here we come upon a valley, which begins at Montbazon, ends at the Loire, and seems to rise and fall, — to bound, as it were, — beneath the châteaux placed on its double hillsides, — a splendid emerald cup, in the depths of which flow the serpentine lines of the river Indre. I gazed at this scene with ineffable delight, for which the gloomy moorland and the fatigue of the sandy walk had prepared me.

“If that woman, the flower of her sex, does indeed inhabit this earth, she is here, on this spot.”

Thus musing, I leaned against a walnut-tree, beneath which I have rested from that day to this whenever I return to my dear valley. Beneath that tree, the confidant of my thoughts, I ask myself what changes there are in me since last I stood there.

My heart deceived me not — she lived there ; the first castle that I saw on the slope of a hill was the dwelling that held her. As I sat beneath my nut-tree, the mid-day sun was sparkling on the slates of her roof and the panes of her windows. Her cambric dress made the

white line which I saw among the vines of an arbor. She was, as you know already without as yet knowing anything, the Lily of this valley, where she grew for heaven, filling it with the fragrance of her virtues. Love, infinite love, without other sustenance than the vision, dimly seen, of which my soul was full, was there, expressed to me by that long ribbon of water flowing in the sunshine between the grass-green banks, by the lines of the poplars adorning with their mobile laces that vale of love, by the oak-woods coming down between the vineyards to the shore, which the river curved and rounded as it chose, and by those dim varying horizons as they fled confusedly away.

If you would see nature beautiful and virgin as a bride, go there of a spring morning. If you would still the bleeding wounds of your heart, return in the last days of autumn. In the spring, Love beats his wings beneath the broad blue sky; in the autumn, we think of those who are no more. The lungs diseased breathe in a blessed purity; the eyes will rest on golden copses which impart to the soul their peaceful stillness. At this moment, when I stood there for the first time, the mills upon the brooksides gave a voice to the quivering valley; the poplars were laughing as they swayed; not a cloud was in the sky; the birds sang, the crickets chirped, —all was melody. Do not ask me again why I love Touraine. I love it, not as we love our cradle, not as we love the oasis in a desert; I love it as an artist loves art; I love it less than I love you; but without Touraine, perhaps I might not now be living.

Without knowing why, my eyes reverted ever to that

white spot, to the woman who shone in that garden as the bell of a convolvulus shines amid the underbrush, and wilts if touched. Moved to the soul, I descended the slopes and soon saw a village, which the superabounding poetry that filled my heart made me fancy without an equal. Imagine three mills placed among islands of graceful outline crowned with groves of trees and rising from a field of water, — for what other name can I give to that aquatic vegetation, so verdant, so finely colored, which carpeted the river, rose above its surface and undulated upon it, yielding to its caprices and swaying to the turmoil of the water when the mill-wheels lashed it. Here and there were mounds of gravel, against which the wavelets broke in fringes that shimmered in the sunlight. Amaryllis, water-lilies, reeds, and phloxes decorated the banks with their glorious tapestry. A trembling bridge of rotten planks, the abutments swathed with flowers, and the hand-rails green with perennials and velvet mosses drooping to the river but not falling to it; mouldering boats, fishing-nets; the monotonous sing-song of a shepherd; ducks paddling among the islands or preening on the “jard,” — a name given to the coarse sand which the Loire brings down; the millers, with their caps over one ear, busily loading their mules, — all these details made the scene before me one of primitive simplicity. Imagine, also, beyond the bridge two or three farm-houses, a dove-cote, turtle-doves, thirty or more dilapidated cottages, separated by gardens, by hedges of honeysuckle, clematis, and jasmine; a dunghill beside each door, and cocks and hens about the road. Such is the village of Pont-de-Ruan, a picturesque little ham-

let leading up to an old church full of character, a church of the days of the Crusades, such a one as painters desire for their pictures. Surround this scene with ancient walnut-trees and slim young poplars with their pale-gold leaves; dot graceful buildings here and there along the grassy slopes where sight is lost beneath the vaporous, warm sky, and you will have some idea of one of the points of view of this most lovely region.

I followed the road to Saché along the left bank of the river, noticing carefully the details of the hills on the opposite shore. At length I reached a park embellished with centennial trees, which I knew to be that of Frapesle. I arrived just as the bell was ringing for breakfast. After the meal, my host, who little suspected that I had walked from Tours, carried me over his estate, from the borders of which I saw the valley on all sides under its many aspects,—here through a vista, there to its broad extent; often my eyes were drawn to the horizon along the golden blade of the Loire, where the sails made fantastic figures among the currents as they flew before the wind. As we mounted a crest I came in sight of the château d'Azay, like a diamond of many facets in a setting of the Indre, standing on wooden piles concealed by flowers. Farther on, in a hollow, I saw the romantic masses of the château of Saché, a sad retreat though full of harmony; too sad for the superficial, but dear to a poet with a soul in pain. I, too, came to love its silence, its great gnarled trees, and the nameless mysterious influence of its solitary valley. But now, each time that we reached an opening towards the neighboring slope which gave to view

the pretty castle I had first noticed in the morning, I stopped to look at it with pleasure.

“Hey!” said my host, reading in my eyes the sparkling desires which youth so ingenuously betrays, “so you scent from afar a pretty woman as a dog scents game!”

I did not like the speech, but I asked the name of the castle and of its owner.

“It is Clochegourde,” he replied; “a pretty house belonging to the Comte de Mortsauf, the head of an historic family in Touraine, whose fortune dates from the days of Louis XI., and whose name tells the story to which they owe their arms and their distinction. Monsieur de Mortsauf is descended from a man who survived the gallows. The family bear: Or, a cross potent and counter-potent sable, charged with a fleur-de-lis or; and *Dieu sauve le Roi notre Sire*, for motto. The count settled here after the return of the emigration. The estate belongs to his wife, a demoiselle de Lenoncourt, of the house of Lenoncourt-Givry which is now dying out. Madame de Mortsauf is an only daughter. The limited fortune of the family contrasts strangely with the distinction of their names; either from pride, or, possibly, from necessity, they never leave Clochegourde and see no company. Until now their attachment to the Bourbons explained this retirement, but the return of the king has not changed their way of living. When I came to reside here last year I paid them a visit of courtesy; they returned it and invited us to dinner; the winter separated us for some months, and political events kept me away from Frapesle until recently. Madame de Mortsauf is a

woman who would hold the highest position wherever she might be.

“Does she often come to Tours?”

“She never goes there. However,” he added, “correcting himself, “she did go there lately to the ball given to the Duc d’Angoulême, who was very gracious to her husband.”

“It was she!” I exclaimed.

“She! who?”

“A woman with beautiful shoulders.”

“You will meet a great many women with beautiful shoulders in Touraine,” he said, laughing. “But if you are not tired we can cross the river and call at Clochegourde and you shall renew acquaintance with those particular shoulders.”

I agreed, not without a blush of shame and pleasure. About four o’clock we reached the little château on which my eyes had fastened from the first. The building; which is finely effective in the landscape, is in reality very modest. It has five windows on the front; those at each end of the façade, looking south, project about twelve feet, — an architectural device which gives the idea of two towers and adds grace to the structure. The middle window serves as a door from which you descend through a double portico into a terraced garden which joins the narrow strip of grass-land that skirts the Indre along its whole course. Though this meadow is separated from the lower terrace, which is shaded by a double line of acacias and Japanese aïlanthus, by the county road, it nevertheless appears from the house to be a part of the garden. for the road is sunken and hemmed in on one side by the terrace, on the other side

by a Norman hedge. The terraces being very well managed put enough distance between the house and the river to avoid the inconveniences of too great proximity to water, without losing the charms of it. Below the house are the stables, coach-house, green-houses, and kitchen, the various openings to which form an arcade. The roof is charmingly rounded at the angles, and bears mansarde windows with carved mullions and leaden finials on their gables. This roof, no doubt much neglected during the Revolution, is stained by a sort of mildew produced by lichens and the reddish moss which grows on houses exposed to the sun. The glass door of the portico is surmounted by a little tower which holds the bell, and on which is carved the escutcheon of the Blamont-Chanvry family, to which Madame de Mortsauf belonged, as follows: Gules, a pale vair, flanked quarterly by two hands clasped or, and two lances in chevron sable. The motto, *Voyez tous, nul ne touche!* struck me greatly. The supporters, a griffin and a dragon gules, enchained or, made a pretty effect in the carving. The Revolution had damaged the ducal crown and the crest, which was a palm-tree vert with fruit or. Senart, the secretary of the committee of public safety was bailiff of Saché before 1781, which explains this destruction.

These arrangements give an elegant air to the little castle, dainty as a flower, which seems to scarcely rest upon the earth. Seen from the valley the ground-floor appears to be the first story; but on the other side it is on a level with a broad gravelled path leading to a grass-plot, on which are several flower-beds. To right and left are vineyards, orchards, and a few

acres of tilled land planted with chestnut-trees which surround the house, the ground falling rapidly to the Indre, where other groups of trees of variegated shades of green, chosen by Nature herself, are spread along the shore. I admired these groups, so charmingly disposed, as we mounted the hilly road which borders Clochegourde ; I breathed an atmosphere of happiness. Has the moral nature, like the physical nature, its own electrical communications and its rapid changes of temperature ? My heart was beating at the approach of events then unrevealed which were to change it forever, just as animals grow livelier when foreseeing fine weather.

This day, so marked in my life, lacked no circumstance that was needed to solemnize it. Nature was adorned like a woman to meet her lover. My soul heard her voice for the first time ; my eyes worshipped her, as fruitful, as varied as my imagination had pictured her in those school-dreams the influence of which I have tried in a few unskilful words to explain to you, for they were to me an Apocalypse in which my life was figuratively foretold ; each event, fortunate or unfortunate, being mated to some one of these strange visions by ties known only to the soul.

We crossed a court-yard surrounded by buildings necessary for the farm work, — a barn, a wine-press, cow-sheds, and stables. Warned by the barking of the watch-dog, a servant came to meet us, saying that Monsieur le comte had gone to Azay in the morning but would soon return, and that Madame la comtesse was at home. My companion looked at me. I fairly trembled lest he should decline to see Madame de Mortsauf

in her husband's absence ; but he told the man to announce us. With the eagerness of a child I rushed into the long antechamber which crosses the whole house.

"Come in, gentlemen," said a golden voice.

Though Madame de Mortsau had spoken only one word at the ball, I recognized her voice, which entered my soul and filled it as a ray of sunshine fills and gilds a prisoner's dungeon. Thinking, suddenly, that she might remember my face, my first impulse was to fly ; but it was too late, — she appeared in the doorway, and our eyes met. I know not which of us blushed deepest. Too much confused for immediate speech she returned to her seat at an embroidery frame while the servant placed two chairs, then she drew out her needle and counted some stitches, as if to explain her silence ; after which she raised her head, gently yet proudly, in the direction of Monsieur de Chessel as she asked to what fortunate circumstance she owed his visit. Though curious to know the secret of my unexpected appearance, she looked at neither of us, — her eyes were fixed on the river ; and yet you could have told by the way she listened that she was able to recognize, as the blind do, the agitations of a neighboring soul by the imperceptible inflexions of the voice.

Monsieur de Chessel gave my name and biography. I had lately arrived at Tours, where my parents had recalled me when the armies threatened Paris. A son of Touraine to whom Touraine was as yet unknown, she would find me a young man weakened by excessive study and sent to Frapesle to amuse himself ; he had already shown me his estate, which I saw for the

first time. I had just told him that I had walked from Tours to Frapesle, and fearing for my health — which was really delicate — he had stopped at Clochegourde to ask her to allow me to rest there. Monsieur de Chessel told the truth ; but the accident seemed so forced that Madame de Mortsaufr distrusted us. She gave me a cold, severe glance, under which my own eyelids fell, as much from a sense of humiliation as to hide the tears that rose beneath them. She saw the moisture on my forehead, and perhaps she guessed the tears ; for she offered me the restoratives I needed, with a few kind and consoling words, which gave me back the power of speech. I blushed like a young girl, and in a voice as tremulous as that of an old man I thanked her and declined.

“ All I ask,” I said, raising my eyes to hers, which mine now met for the second time in a glance as rapid as lightning, — “ is to rest here. I am so crippled with fatigue I really cannot walk farther.”

“ You must not doubt the hospitality of our beautiful Touraine,” she said ; then, turning to my companion, she added : “ You will give us the pleasure of your dining at Clochegourde ? ”

I threw such a look of entreaty at Monsieur de Chessel that he began the preliminaries of accepting the invitation, though it was given in a manner that seemed to expect a refusal. As a man of the world, he recognized these shades of meaning ; but I, a young man without experience, believed so implicitly in the sincerity between word and thought of this beautiful woman that I was wholly astonished when my host said to me, after we reached home that evening, “ I stayed because

I saw you were dying to do so ; but if you do not succeed in making it all right, I may find myself on bad terms with my neighbors." That expression, "if you do not make it all right," made me ponder the matter deeply. In other words, if I pleased Madame de Mortsauf, she would not be displeased with the man who introduced me to her. He evidently thought I had the power to please her ; this in itself gave me that power, and corroborated my inward hope at a moment when it needed some outward succor.

"I am afraid it will be difficult," he began ; "Madame de Chessel expects us."

"She has you every day," replied the countess ; "besides, we can send her word. Is she alone?"

"No, the Abbé de Quélus is there."

"Well, then," she said, rising to ring the bell, "you really must dine with us."

This time Monsieur de Chessel thought her in earnest, and gave me a congratulatory look. As soon as I was sure of passing a whole evening under that roof I seemed to have eternity before me. For many miserable beings to-morrow is a word without meaning, and I was of the number who had no faith in it ; when I was certain of a few hours of happiness I made them contain a whole lifetime of delight.

Madame de Mortsauf talked about local affairs, the harvest, the vintage, and other matters to which I was a total stranger. This usually argues either a want of breeding or great contempt for the stranger present who is thus shut out from the conversation, but in this case it was embarrassment. Though at first I thought she treated me as a child and I envied the man of thirty

to whom she talked of serious matters which I could not comprehend, I came, a few months later, to understand how significant a woman's silence often is, and how many thoughts a voluble conversation masks. At first I attempted to be at my ease and take part in it, then I perceived the advantages of my situation and gave myself up to the charm of listening to Madame de Mortsauf's voice. The breath of her soul rose and fell among the syllables as sound is divided by the notes of a flute; it died away to the ear as it quickened the pulsation of the blood. Her way of uttering the terminations in *i* was like a bird's song; the *ch* as she said it was a kiss, but the *t*'s were an echo of her heart's despotism. She thus extended, without herself knowing that she did so, the meaning of her words, leading the soul of the listener into regions above this earth. Many a time I have continued a discussion I could easily have ended, many a time I have allowed myself to be unjustly scolded that I might listen to those harmonies of the human voice, that I might breathe the air of her soul as it left her lips, and strain to my soul that spoken light as I would fain have strained the speaker to my breast. A swallow's song of joy it was when she was gay! — but when she spoke of her griefs, a swan's voice calling to its mates!

Madame de Mortsauf's inattention to my presence enabled me to examine her. My eyes rejoiced as they glided over the sweet speaker; they kissed her feet, they clasped her waist, they played with the ringlets of her hair. And yet I was a prey to terror, as all *who*, once in their lives, have experienced the illimitable joys of a true passion will understand. I feared she would

detect me if I let my eyes rest upon the shoulder I had kissed, and the fear sharpened the temptation. I yielded, I looked, my eyes tore away the covering; I saw the mole which lay where the pretty line between the shoulders started, and which, ever since the ball, had sparkled in that twilight which seems the region of the sleep of youths whose imagination is ardent and whose life is chaste.

I can sketch for you the leading features which all eyes saw in Madame de Mortsaut; but no drawing, however correct, no color, however warm, can represent her to you. Her face was of those that require the unattainable artist, whose hand can paint the reflection of inward fires and render that luminous vapor which defies science and is not revealable by language — but which a lover sees. Her soft, fair hair often caused her much suffering, no doubt through sudden rushes of blood to the head. Her brow, round and prominent like that of Joeonda, teemed with unuttered thoughts, restrained feelings — flowers drowning in bitter waters. The eyes, of a green tinge flecked with brown, were always wan; but if her children were in question, or if some keen emotion of joy or suffering (rare in the lives of all resigned women) seized her, those eyes sent forth a subtile gleam as if from fires that were consuming her, — the gleam that wrung the tears from mine when she covered me with her contempt, and which sufficed to lower the boldest eyelid. A Grecian nose, designed it might be by Phidias, and united by its double arch to lips that were gracefully curved, spiritualized the face, which was oval with a skin of the texture of a white camellia colored with soft rose-tints

in the clouds. This involuntary revelation of her being made others thoughtful. The rarity of her gestures, above all, the rarity of her glances — for, excepting her children, she seldom looked at any one — gave a strange solemnity to all she said and did when her words or actions seemed to her to compromise her dignity.

On this particular morning Madame de Mortsauf wore a rose-colored gown patterned in tiny stripes, a collar with a wide hem, a black belt, and little boots of the same hue. Her hair was simply twisted round her head, and held in place by a tortoise-shell comb. Such, my dear Natalie, is the imperfect sketch I promised you. But the constant emanation of her soul upon her family, that nurturing essence shed in floods around her as the sun emits its light, her inward nature, her cheerfulness on days serene, her resignation on stormy ones, — all those variations of expression by which character is displayed depend, like the effects in the sky, on unexpected and fugitive circumstances, which have no connection with each other except the background against which they rest, though all are necessarily mingled with the events of this history. — truly a household epic, as great to the eyes of a wise man as a tragedy to the eyes of the crowd, an epic in which you will feel an interest, not only for the part I took in it, but for the likeness that it bears to the destinies of so vast a number of women.

Everything at Clochegourde bore signs of a truly English cleanliness. The room in which the countess received us was panelled throughout and painted in two shades of gray. The mantelpiece was ornamented with

a clock inserted in a block of mahogany and surmounted with a tazza, and two large vases of white porcelain with gold lines, which held bunches of Cape heather. A lamp was on a pier-table, and a backgammon board on legs before the fireplace. Two wide bands of cotton held back the white cambric curtains, which had no fringe. The furniture was covered with gray cotton bound with a green braid, and the tapestry on the countess's frame told why the upholstery was thus covered. Such simplicity rose to grandeur. No apartment, among all that I have since seen, has given me such fertile, such teeming impressions as those that filled my mind in that salon of Clochegourde, calm and composed as the life of its mistress, where the conventual regularity of her occupations made itself felt. The greater part of my ideas in science or politics, even the boldest of them, were born in that room, as perfumes emanate from flowers; there grew the mysterious plant that cast upon my soul its fructifying pollen; there glowed the solar warmth which developed my good and shrivelled my evil qualities. Through the windows the eye took in the valley from the heights of Pont-de-Ruan to the château d'Azay, following the windings of the farther shore, picturesquely varied by the towers of Frapesle, the church, the village, and the old manor-house of Saché, whose venerable pile looked down upon the meadows.

In harmony with this reposeful life, and without other excitements to emotion than those arising in the family, this scene conveyed to the soul its own serenity. If I had met her there for the first time, between the count and her two children, instead of seeing her resplendent

in a ball dress, I should not have ravished that delirious kiss, which now filled me with remorse and with the fear of having lost the future of my love. No; in the gloom of my unhappy life I should have bent my knee and kissed the hem of her garment, wetting it with tears, and then I might have flung myself into the Indre. But having breathed the jasmine perfume of her skin and drunk the milk of that cup of love, my soul had acquired the knowledge and the hope of human joys; I would live and await the coming of happiness as the savage awaits his hour of vengeance; I longed to climb those trees, to creep among the vines, to float in the river; I wanted the companionship of night and its silence, I needed lassitude of body, I craved the heat of the sun to make the eating of the delicious apple into which I had bitten perfect. Had she asked of me the singing flower, the riches buried by the comrades of Morgan the destroyer, I would have sought them, to obtain those other riches and that mute flower for which I longed.

When my dream, the dream into which this first contemplation of my idol plunged me, came to an end and I heard her speaking of Monsieur de Mortsauf, the thought came that a woman must belong to her husband, and a raging curiosity possessed me to see the owner of this treasure. Two emotions filled my mind, hatred and fear, — hatred which allowed of no obstacles and measured all without shrinking, and a vague, but real fear of the struggle, of its issue, and above all of HER.

“Here is Monsieur de Mortsauf,” she said.

I sprang to my feet like a startled horse. Though the movement was seen by Monsieur de Chessel and

the countess, neither made any observation, for a diversion was effected at this moment by the entrance of a little girl, whom I took to be about six years old, who came in exclaiming, "Here 's papa!"

"Madeleine?" said her mother, gently.

The child at once held out her hand to Monsieur de Chessel, and looked attentively at me after making a little bow with an air of astonishment.

"Are you more satisfied about her health?" asked Monsieur de Chessel.

"She is better," replied the countess, caressing the little head which was already nestling in her lap.

The next question of Monsieur de Chessel let me know that Madeleine was nine years old; I showed great surprise, and immediately the clouds gathered on the mother's brow. My companion threw me a significant look, — one of those which form the education of men of the world. I had stumbled no doubt upon some maternal wound the covering of which should have been respected. The sickly child, whose eyes were pallid and whose skin was as white as a porcelain vase with a light within it, would probably not have lived in the atmosphere of a city. Country air and her mother's brooding care had kept the life in that frail body, delicate as a hot-house plant growing in a harsh and foreign climate. Though in nothing did she remind me of her mother, Madeleine seemed to have her soul, and that soul held her up. Her hair was scanty and black, her eyes and cheeks hollow, her arms thin, her chest narrow, showing a battle between life and death, a duel without truce in which the mother had so far been victorious. The child willed to live, — perhaps to spare her mother,

for at times, when not observed, she fell into the attitude of a weeping-willow. You might have thought her a little gypsy dying of hunger, begging her way, exhausted but always brave and dressed up to play her part.

“Where have you left Jacques?” asked the countess, kissing the white line which parted the child’s hair into two bands that looked like a crow’s wings.

“He is coming with papa.”

Just then the count entered, holding his son by the hand. Jacques, the image of his sister, showed the same signs of weakness. Seeing these sickly children beside a mother so magnificently healthy it was impossible not to guess at the causes of the grief which clouded her brow and kept her silent on a subject she could take to God only. As he bowed, Monsieur de Mortsauf gave me a glance that was less observing than awkwardly uneasy, — the glance of a man whose distrust grows out of his inability to analyze. After explaining the circumstances of our visit, and naming me to him, the countess gave him her place and left the room. The children, whose eyes were on those of their mother as if they drew the light of theirs from hers, tried to follow her; but she said, with a finger on her lips. “Stay, dears!” and they obeyed, but their eyes filled. Ah! to hear that one word “dears” what tasks they would have undertaken!

Like the children, I felt less warm when she had left us. My name seemed to change the count’s feeling toward me. Cold and supercilious in his first glance, he became at once, if not affectionate, at least politely attentive, showing me every consideration and seeming

pleased to receive me as a guest. My father had formerly done devoted service to the Bourbons, and had played an important and perilous, though secret part. When their cause was lost by the elevation of Napoleon he took refuge in the quietude of the country and domestic life, accepting the unmerited accusations that followed him as the inevitable reward of those who risk all to win all, and who succumb after serving as pivot to the political machine. Knowing nothing of the fortunes, nor of the past, nor of the future of my family, I was unaware of this devoted service which the Comte de Mortsaufl well remembered. Moreover, the antiquity of our name, the most precious quality of a man in his eyes, added to the warmth of his greeting. I knew nothing of these reasons until later ; for the time being the sudden transition to cordiality put me at my ease. When the two children saw that we were all three fairly engaged in conversation, Madeleine slipped her head from her father's hand, glanced at the open door, and glided away like an eel, Jacques following her. They rejoined their mother, and I heard their voices and their movements, sounding in the distance like the murmur of bees about a hive.

I watched the count, trying to guess his character, but I became so interested in certain leading traits that I got no further than a superficial examination of his personality. Though he was only forty-five years old, he seemed nearer sixty, so much had the great shipwreck at the close of the eighteenth century aged him. The crescent of hair which monastically fringed the back of his head, otherwise completely bald, ended at the ears in little tufts of gray mingled with black. His

face bore a vague resemblance to that of a white wolf with blood about its muzzle, for his nose was inflamed and gave signs of a life poisoned at its springs and vitiated by diseases of long standing. His flat forehead, too broad for the face beneath it, which ended in a point, and transversely wrinkled in crooked lines, gave signs of a life in the open air, but not of any mental activity; it also showed the burden of constant misfortunes, but not of any efforts made to surmount them. His cheek-bones, which were brown and prominent amid the general pallor of his skin, showed a physical structure which was likely to insure him a long life. His hard, light-yellow eye fell upon mine like a ray of wintry sun, bright without warmth, anxious without thought, distrustful without conscious cause. His mouth was violent and domineering, his chin flat and long. Thin and very tall, he had the bearing of a gentleman who relies upon the conventional value of his caste, who knows himself above others by right, and beneath them in fact. The carelessness of country life made him neglect his external appearance. His dress was that of a countryman whom peasants and neighbors no longer considered except for his territorial worth. His brown and wiry hands showed that he wore no gloves unless he mounted a horse, or went to church, and his shoes were thick and common.

Though ten years of emigration and ten years more of farm-life had changed his physical condition, he still retained certain vestiges of nobility. The bitterest liberal (a term not then in circulation) would readily have admitted his chivalric loyalty and the imperishable convictions of one who pins his faith to the *Quotidi-*

enne ; he would have felt respect for the man religiously devoted to a cause, honest in his political antipathies, incapable of serving his party but very capable of injuring it, and without the slightest real knowledge of the affairs of France. The count was in fact one of those upright men who are available for nothing, but stand obstinately in the way of all ; ready to die under arms at the post assigned to them, but preferring to give their life rather than to give their money.

During dinner I detected, in the hanging of his flaccid cheeks and the covert glances he cast now and then upon his children, the traces of some wearing thought which showed for a moment upon the surface. Watching him, who could fail to understand him ? Who would not have seen that he had fatally transmitted to his children those weakly bodies in which the principle of life was lacking. But if he blamed himself he denied to others the right to judge him. Harsh as one who knows himself in fault, yet without greatness of soul or charm to compensate for the weight of misery he had thrown into the balance, his private life was no doubt the scene of irascibilities that were plainly revealed in his angular features and by the incessant restlessness of his eye. When his wife returned, followed by the children who seemed fastened to her side, I felt the presence of unhappiness, just as in walking over the roof of a vault the feet become in some way conscious of the depths below. Seeing these four human beings together, holding them all as it were in one glance, letting my eye pass from one to the other, studying their countenances and their respective attitudes, thoughts steeped in sadness fell upon my heart as a fine gray

